

## IPBA Conference 2018 (Manila) Trip Report by Amardeep Singh

I was humbled to be selected as the IPBA scholar for 2018 and invited to attend the IPBA Conference held over three days from 14 to 16 March 2018 at Shangri-La at the Fort, Manila.

Before we began the day's programme on 14 March 2018, I had the privilege of meeting my fellow IPBA scholars who came from Thailand, India, Nepal, Japan, Iran and Myanmar. After acquainting ourselves with each other, we started the day with a visit to the Makati District Regional Trial Court. Upon reaching the court, I was struck at how the courtrooms were located within the Makati City Hall and not in a separate courthouse building. It made me wonder whether this concept of having a "one-stop" centre for all legal and administrative matters might be worth emulating in other jurisdictions.

Although we were scheduled to observe a hearing in a designated courtroom, it turned out that the hearing had been vacated. Instead, we had the benefit of speaking with two judges – the resident judge of the particular courtroom and his colleague. The two judges began the session with an introduction to the Philippines' legal and judicial systems. Attention was then turned to the contemporary challenges faced by their legal system. One of the challenges highlighted was the difficulty in prosecuting offenders who commit cyber-crimes, e.g. online scams. This difficulty arose because a sizeable number of such crimes were committed by offenders outside the Philippines, which made their apprehension and prosecution difficult. All of us agreed with the judges that these were challenges similarly faced by our respective jurisdictions. The judges commented that the IPBA conferences might serve as excellent platforms for the discussion of such issues among lawyers from different jurisdictions. This would facilitate the exchange of ideas in overcoming these challenges.

After the rich discussion with the judges, the entourage visited the office of the prominent law firm, Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura Sayoc & De Los Angeles ("Romulo"). Our hosts at Romulo warmly welcomed us into their office where they introduced us to the firm, its history and work. Our hosts then brought us on a tour of the firm. Of particular pride to the firm was its support for local Filipino artists. This was evident in the many art pieces that adorned the walls of their office. Our hosts were also proud of their significant involvement and strong support of this year's IPBA Conference in Manila.

Upon completion of the morning activities, we proceeded to the Shangri-La for the afternoon's conference opening. The opening ceremony left many of us in awe of its grandeur and the sheer number of participants. After that, the conference began in full swing. With contemporary issues being discussed at the concurrent committee sessions, it was difficult to choose which ones to attend. Eventually, I chose to attend sessions that I felt were especially important to me and which are highlighted below.

The first noteworthy session covered the training of junior lawyers (Training and Mentoring Junior Lawyers in the Legal Profession by the Legal Development & Training Committee). This session addressed topics like (i) why should junior lawyers be trained, (ii) what the training should include, (iii) training methods, and (iv) the challenges presented in the training of junior lawyers. The session witnessed lively discussions. While views diverged, it was unanimously agreed that the training of junior lawyers was important and firms had a responsibility to ensure that their lawyers receive proper training. One sentiment that was expressed by the more senior practitioners in the room was their exasperation at how junior lawyers wanted "work-life balance". These practitioners felt that the legal profession was one where such expectations were unrealistic. While their views are understandable, there is

nothing wrong for a lawyer, like others, to desire work-life balance. After all, a person has responsibilities outside of work and life is not necessarily defined by work alone. May it be time for the legal profession to revisit its traditional assumptions and expectations and evaluate if the practice of law should evolve to meet changing societal norms? This may well serve as an excellent topic for next year's conference.

The second notable session covered corruption investigations (Challenges in Conducting Corruption Investigations in the Asia-Pacific Region by the Anti-Corruption and Rule of Law Committee). This session focused on obstacles to effective domestic corruption investigations and the working relationships between lawyers and corruption investigative agencies. One of the issues highlighted was the different treatment of corruption across jurisdictions and how these contrasting official attitudes impact the effectiveness of investigations. Countries that were least corrupt, according to the rankings published by the Corruption Perceptions Index ("CPI"), tend to adopt a zero tolerance approach towards corruption whilst those in the bottom of the CPI appeared to adopt a lackadaisical stance towards it. One of the contemporary challenges was the threat that corruption investigations posed to legal professional privilege (covering both legal advice and litigation privileges) ("LPP"). Law firms are commonly engaged by companies and individuals to conduct investigations into possible offences committed by them. Subsequently, law firms provide these persons and entities with legal advice. The threat to LPP arises when anti-corruption authorities raid law firms to seize evidence that constitute clients' documents and property. Do authorities have a right to raid a law firm and seize their clients' documents which are protected by at least one of the privileges? Many in the panel and in the audience agreed that this was a critical issue and each jurisdiction addressed it differently. This may well serve as a topic for discussion at next year's conference.

Apart from the sessions, the Welcome Reception, the Gala Dinner and the Farewell Reception were memorable. It was evident that the organisers had put in tremendous effort in ensuring that the participants enjoyed everything from the food to the entertainment. Of special significance to the IPBA Scholars was our warm welcome by fellow IPBA members during the New Members and Scholars Reception. This moment was remarkable because we felt that the IPBA valued our presence at and contributions to the conference. It was also an excellent opportunity for us to become acquainted with fellow IPBA members.

The IPBA conference in Manila was certainly a meaningful experience. Apart from being fortunate to have been selected as a Scholar, it was my first time participating in an IPBA conference and visiting Manila. I benefitted from my interactions with fellow scholars where I learnt more about them and their countries. Many friendships were forged and many memories were formed. Without realising it, the three days flew by so quickly and soon, it was time for me to leave Manila. I bade Manila a fond farewell, promising to return to explore this beautiful city filled with its happy people. I look forward to reconnecting with friends from the IPBA in 2019 in my sunny hometown of Singapore.